



Research Update is published by the Butler Center for Research to share significant scientific findings from the field of addiction treatment research.

# Outcomes of Alcohol/Other Drug Dependency Treatment

## What are Successful Outcomes?

Successful treatment outcomes can be defined in a number of ways. Many outcomes measures focus specifically on the quantity and frequency of substance use during a predefined period of time following discharge from alcohol or drug (AOD) treatment. However, other measures of life functioning can provide a more complete picture of treatment success. These measures include quality of life, level of functioning in one's career or job, level of involvement with the legal system, and the extent to which a person requires medical care or hospitalization for medical problems associated with alcohol or drug use.

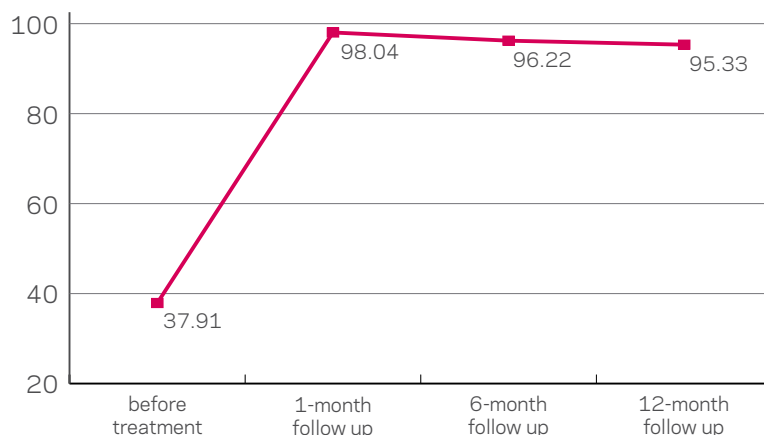
## What Does the Research Show?

The Butler Center for Research at Hazelden (BCR) regularly collects, analyzes, and disseminates outcomes data from patients attending a wide variety of Hazelden programs. Specially trained BCR staff conduct telephone interviews with patients at roughly 1, 6 and 12 months following discharge from Hazelden. Outcomes analyses are performed at each follow up and typically focus on two measures related to substance use: the percentage of patients who report being continuously abstinent from alcohol and drugs for the entire follow up period (continuous abstinence), and the percentage of days during the follow up period that patients remain abstinent from alcohol (PDA from alcohol).

The continuous abstinence rate at the 1 month follow up for patients attending residential treatment at Hazelden's Center City location typically runs in the low to mid 80s, indicating that the majority of patients successfully remain abstinent within the first month following discharge. The abstinence rate is typically in the low to mid 60s during the 6 month follow up period and runs in the low to mid 50s during the 12 month follow up period.

Another way to examine substance use outcomes is to compare the percentage of days patients remained abstinent from alcohol (PDA) during a period of time following treatment as compared to a period of time before treatment. The following graph shows the average PDA from alcohol among a recent sample of Center City residential patients:

**Percent days abstinent from alcohol at baseline and at each follow up after treatment—Center City primary patients**



Note: PDA is significantly higher at all follow-ups compared to baseline (all  $ps < .000$ )

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## CONTROVERSIES AND QUESTIONS

Recovery from alcohol/drug dependence is a complex, multi-factorial process. However, research studies typically focus on a small number of measures and may not always reflect the bigger picture. For example, a person may relapse briefly in early recovery before he or she is able to achieve long term abstinence. At the same time, the person might be regularly attending Twelve Step groups, improving relationships with others, and being more responsible at work or school. Most people would consider this person a treatment success. On the other hand, a person might achieve total abstinence from alcohol and drugs but continue to experience other difficulties such as problems with personal relationships, legal difficulties, or problems with job performance. Even though the person has remained abstinent, most people would be somewhat reluctant to label this person as a treatment success. Future studies of treatment outcomes should include a large number of measures across a variety of life functioning areas.

Future research may also focus on questions such as:

- What length of stay, treatment setting, and type of services produce the best outcomes?
- To what extent are psychotropic medications effective when combined with traditional psychosocial approaches?
- What types of treatment produce the best outcomes for individuals having a mental health condition in addition to substance dependence?

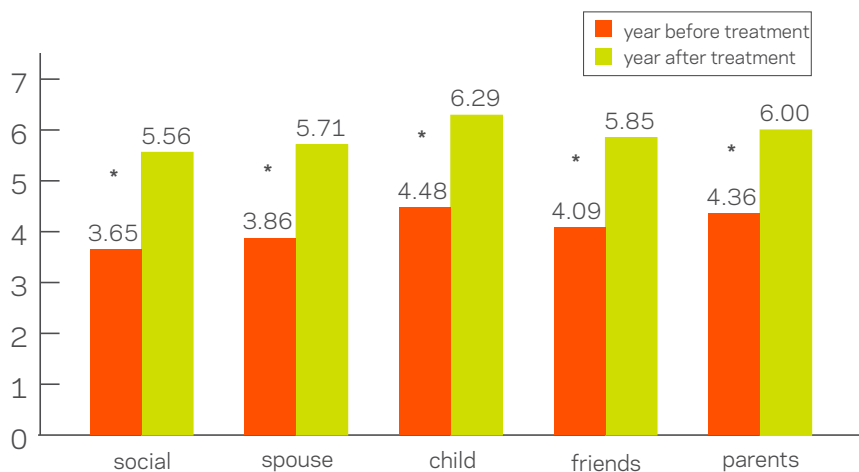
Research that focuses on measuring the process of recovery and best methods to help people enter into and sustain their recovery will help answer these questions.

## Outcomes of Alcohol/Other Drug Dependency Treatment

This graph shows that patients have a very high PDA from alcohol within the entire year following treatment. Even at the 12 month follow up, PDA from alcohol is dramatically higher than at baseline, demonstrating a statistically significant improvement in alcohol use during the year following treatment.

Dramatic improvement from pre- to post-treatment is also observed for a number of other outcomes measures. The following graph shows average quality of life ratings for a number of life domains in the year following treatment compared to before treatment (higher scores represent higher quality of life):

Quality of life ratings before and after treatment—CC primary



\* denotes a significant difference ( $p < .05$ )

Patients reported experiencing significantly higher quality of life after treatment compared to before across all life domains. Similar improvements pre- to post-treatment have been found in healthcare service utilization, job/career performance, and legal outcomes such as number of arrests and number of DUIs.

### How to use this information

In general, Hazelden data as well as other published studies suggest that alcohol and drug treatment is effective. It is important for those seeking help for alcohol and other drug problems to find a treatment approach that best suits their needs. It is also important to recognize that sustained recovery from alcohol and drug dependence is a complex phenomenon involving multiple factors, and treatment success can be measured in a variety of ways across a number of different domains.

### Additional Research Updates from the Butler Center for Research.

Research Updates can be downloaded from [HazeldenBettyFord.org](http://HazeldenBettyFord.org)

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#### Criminal Justice

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#### Epidemiology

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The Importance of Continuing Care

Therapeutic Alliance: Improving Treatment Outcomes

Treatment Outcomes Among Youth

Outcomes of Alcohol/Other Drug Dependency Treatment

#### Special Populations

Attorneys and Substance Abuse

Health Professionals: Addiction and Treatment

Drug Use, Misuse, and Dependence Among Older Adults

Substance Abuse, Dependence, and Mental Health Among LGBTQ

Substance Use in the Workplace

Women & Substance Abuse

#### Youth

College Binge Drinking

Youth Social Norms

Prevalence of Adolescent Substance Abuse

Preventing Adolescent Substance Abuse

Treatment Outcomes Among Youth

Youth Violence and Alcohol/Drug Abuse Youth Social Norms

The Butler Center for Research informs and improves recovery services and produces research that benefits the field of addiction treatment. We are dedicated to conducting clinical research, collaborating with external researchers, and communicating scientific findings.

Audrey Klein, PhD,  
Director

If you have questions, or would like to request copies of Research Update, please call 800-257-7800, ext. 4405, email [ButlerResearch@HazeldenBettyFord.org](mailto:ButlerResearch@HazeldenBettyFord.org), or write BC 4, P.O. Box 11, Center City, MN 55012-0011.